



Walk Friendly Communities

walkfriendly.org

COMMUNITY REPORT CARD AND FEEDBACK

Los Altos, California
May 4, 2015

Introduction

Thank you for submitting an application to the Walk Friendly Communities program on behalf of Los Altos, California! A Walk Friendly Community is a city or town that has shown a commitment to improving walkability and pedestrian safety through comprehensive programs, plans and policies.

Each application was evaluated by at least three reviewers to provide a fair assessment of your community and provide technical feedback on how to improve the walkability of your community. After thorough consideration of your application, we are unable to designate Los Altos as a Walk Friendly Community. However, we were impressed with the city's commitment to safety around schools, progress improving traffic signals, and the new ADA transition plan.

The application to the Walk Friendly Communities program is an endorsement of your community's desire to support active transportation. It is our hope that the feedback and information we provide can help your community improve in this regard.

We have noted several areas in which your community can improve its policies, programs, and standards. Please continue to build upon this foundation to work to become a Walk Friendly Community. This report card provides detailed feedback on how your community can take its programs and initiatives to the next level; take the time to review the feedback and contact us with any questions.

Primary Recommendations

This section identifies and provides suggestions for the most vital areas of improving Los Altos's overall walkability. Additional details are provided in the following sections. **We recommend that you read these areas thoroughly and develop clear goals, benchmarks, funding sources, and an implementation schedule for reaching these goals.**

- Creating a **dedicated pedestrian plan** with concrete deadlines and performance measures would be a helpful way of prioritizing and implementing pedestrian facilities and programs in Los Altos.
- Sidewalks are the backbone of a Walk Friendly Community. Los Altos needs to increase the speed at which it is **constructing new sidewalks**.

- An **Open Streets event** during which a selected route will be closed to vehicle traffic and opened up for jogging, walking, and cycling would be a great way to promote active living and encourage more walking.
- It is time to consider developing new **safety campaigns** and **education programs**.
- Los Altos could expand **staff training** opportunities by offering free webinars for city officials, planning and engineering staff, and school staff.
- **Targeted enforcement** could be a great way for police in Los Altos to focus attention on pedestrian safety and ensure that motorists are aware of pedestrian safety laws.
- Develop an **ongoing count program** to regularly determine the levels of walking.
- There are a number of **comprehensive evaluation tools**, including Walkability Checklists and Road Safety Audits, which can help planners and residents of Los Altos to understand how to improve the pedestrian environment.

Feedback by Section

This remainder of this report card will provide detailed feedback and suggestions for each section in the community assessment tool. Feedback will include research to support the importance of this question as well as tools, guides, and case studies of successful implementations in other communities.

Each section received an overall score as defined below:

- **Walk Friendly:** The responses in this section indicate that your community is particularly strong in this area with great efforts being made towards improving walkability. Even so, there are always areas within this section where improvements and growth could be made.
- **On the Right Track:** This score indicates that your community does not exhibit the characteristics to be truly walk friendly in this section, but that there are still good existing programs or new programs that could be expanded. Please review our suggestions on how you could improve the walkability in this area.
- **Needs Attention:** This score indicates that your community does not yet demonstrate strong programs, policies, and results, characteristic of a Walk Friendly Community based on the responses in this section. Please review our suggestions carefully on how you can create positive change in your community with both short- and long-term objectives.

Community Profile

Walk Friendly

- It is extremely encouraging to see a full-time coordinator with advisory and advocacy committees as well! Consider splitting your advisory board into mode-specific task forces to ensure that pedestrian and bicycle issues remain balanced—it is very common for bicycle issues to dominate the conversation.
- Signing the [International Charter for Walking](#) would be a great way for city leadership to demonstrate its commitment to enhancing walkability and pedestrian safety.

Status of Walking Needs Attention

- Unfortunately it looks like walking mode share in Los Altos is somewhat low, hovering at, or below, the national average. Single occupant vehicles appear to be the dominant means for traveling to work, as the mode shares for transit and biking are also low.
- The crash rate is relatively high in Los Altos and nearly every reported crash resulted in an injury. It would be worthwhile to check if the police department is also reporting crashes that do not result in an injury. With the city's low fatality rate, it could also be that crashes are happening at slower speeds and as the result of pedestrian exposure. Your city needs to analyze the crash reports and roadway conditions for reported incidents.

Planning Needs Attention

- It is great to see that you have a pedestrian plan in the works. This plan should draw on public input, baseline data, and other aspects and should include SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound) goals. A target mode share would provide a specific goal for the city to attain, while a crash reduction goal can provide extra impetus in implementing crash countermeasures.
- One of the main reasons the Pedestrian Master Plan of Seattle, the only Platinum-level Walk Friendly Community, is such a successful document is the clear establishment of goals and measurable [performance indicators](#). With the objective of becoming the country's most walkable city, Seattle established baseline measurements, performance targets, and data collection processes to improve walkability. These indicators fit into the four main goals of the plan: Safety, Equity, Vibrancy, and Health and contain such examples as reaching ten new schools a year with outreach and increasing pedestrian volumes in selected count locations.
- Fort Collins, a Bronze-level Walk Friendly Community, has a comprehensive [Pedestrian Plan](#) that sets reachable targets.
- Your new ADA transition plan seems fairly comprehensive, but since sidewalks, signals, and crossings are not included in the inventory, there needs to be a clear link to the new pedestrian plan. Ideally, the city should identify a stable source of funding to ensure that ADA treatments continue to be funded and implemented irrespective of the status of the General Fund.
- Los Altos could use a standalone Complete Streets policy that is adopted by city council. Complete Streets are designed to create safe and convenient access for all users, including bicyclists, pedestrians, motorists, and transit riders. The [National Complete Streets Coalition](#) provides some useful guidelines and many other resources about this initiative.
- By adopting a Complete Streets policy, some communities have been able to leverage more funds for pedestrian infrastructure. Forest Park, Illinois, a Bronze-level Walk Friendly Community, has a great Complete Streets policy, which was signed by the Mayor and demonstrates a good understanding of Complete Streets and outlines performance measures. Los Altos could use this as an [example](#).

- Pushback from the public can be a deterrent to completing these projects, but education and outreach can go a long way to getting the support needed. Check out this the new [Safer Streets, Stronger Economies](#) publication from Smart Growth America (SGA); there may be some examples in it that can help you make the case. Another [recent report](#) from SGA discusses how to evaluate Complete Streets projects and report the results to decision makers and the public.
- Public input is vital to creating a vision for the community that is lasting and appealing to residents. Los Altos does a reasonable job of soliciting public input from citizens, but should consider working with groups that are likely to be pedestrians (e.g. people in wheelchairs/with disabilities). Hopefully there will be more active public outreach for the new pedestrian plan.
- Bronze-level Burlington, Vermont, offers the option for drop-in public comments during expanded business hours, the option for child care/translators, and an outreach employee focused on new residents/immigrants. Los Altos should also consider online tools for gathering public input (social media, project websites that utilize crowdsourcing, surveys, etc.).
- Arlington County, Virginia, a Gold-level Walk Friendly Community, began holding “Walking Town Meetings” in an effort to solicit more specific public input, in 2007. Through local civic associations, community members took Arlington Board members and staff on a walking tour of the neighborhood to highlight issues of concern, ideas for improvements, and to showcase the community. Following the meeting, planning staff documented the issues that were presented as information and possible alternatives for consideration by the County Board. Los Altos could institute a program like this that incorporates more active public input.
- Even though Los Altos is largely built-out, a connectivity policy is still important in terms of encouraging pedestrian access and pedestrian travel, particularly with ensuring that infill development maintains or improves pedestrian access. More information about connectivity can be found [here](#). The Victoria Transport Policy Institute also provides [guidelines](#) on connectivity policies. Silver-level Bend, Oregon, has a Development Code that establishes pedestrian friendly block lengths in different zones of the city (e.g., 400 feet block length and 1,500 feet block perimeter in the Central Business District). See page 234 of this [PDF](#).
- Los Altos should consider requiring pedestrian connections even if a street connection is deemed infeasible. If the Planning Director waives the connectivity requirement in Bronze-level Cary, North Carolina, then the town requires residential developments to provide a pedestrian trail to link any cul-de-sacs. Check out section 7.10 of Cary’s [Land Development Ordinance](#).
- A strong public transit system is linked with more walking, as transit riders are also pedestrians at some point during the trip. It is good to see that your transit agency has an access study in the works. For background on ADA and transit, check out the [Transit Access Project](#) from AARP Livable Communities.
- With a relatively low percentage of transit stops located within easy walking distance of residences, it makes sense that the transit mode share numbers shown in the Census are on the low end. You might consider a wayfinding signage system to help pedestrians find their way to stops. Signs with information about how far they need to walk (e.g. five-minute walk to bus stop) are especially useful.
- Los Altos should comprehensively evaluate its parking programs and should strongly consider maximum parking standards and parking cashout incentives as well as shared

parking allowances. The example of Gold-level Arlington County, Virginia, demonstrates a proactive approach to adapting parking standards to support walking and compact city development. Arlington has a goal of developing as a dense, transit-oriented community that required strategic management of parking. The policies the community has implemented showcase a superb understanding of market-based parking management. Parking costs are unbundled from housing and public on-street spaces are provided at minimal cost to car-sharing programs. For commercial development, below-grade parking is the norm and Arlington also encourages shared parking between uses.

- For more information about parking practices that create a safer, more comfortable pedestrian environment, check out the EPA's [Parking Spaces/Community Places](#) guidebook and this [Strategic Parking Plan](#) from Gold-level, Denver, Colorado.
- According to research, dense development leads to higher levels of walking and transit use and less driving. Some measures to increase density, such as form-based codes and density bonuses, can be very positive for the vitality of a community or city center. This [EPA resource](#) can provide more information about this subject. More information about density bonuses is available through the University of Wisconsin's [Center for Land Use Education](#).
- Silver-level Redwood City, California, has a [form-based code](#) and a requirement for mixed-use that could be useful as a resource in Los Altos.
- Providing guidelines for the placement of amenities in the right of way would be beneficial. Street trees, lighting, benches, public art, and more can really enhance the pedestrian experience, promoting more walking and improving safety. Check out [Seattle's Right of Way Improvement](#) Manual for an example. Chicago, a Gold-level Walk Friendly Community, has multiple [design guides](#) available on the city's complete streets website, including Streetscapes Design Guidelines and Complete Streets Guidelines.

Education & Encouragement Needs Attention

- It is good to see that the school is working with the district to audit the walking conditions around the schools, but Los Altos needs to increase the number of schools that have ongoing Safe Routes to School Programs. Activities like [walking school buses](#) along safe routes or promotional walking events are vital ways of getting kids into the habit of safely walking to school. Sharing [success stories from other California communities](#) might also help motivate school leadership in Los Altos.
- The Safe Routes to School program in Fort Collins is a model program for other communities. They have 20+ schools participating in full Safe Routes activities and 20 more schools conducting special walk events. The city's SRTS program has conducted comprehensive walkability audits at several schools in the local public school district, and it has developed Safe Routes maps for all schools in the district, available [online](#).
- Ongoing education for professional staff underscores the priority a community places upon the importance of walking, walkability, and pedestrian safety. Los Altos should take some extra steps to educate not only planning and engineering staff, but law enforcement, health professionals, and others with regard to pedestrian accommodation and safety. By educating public officials, communities can help ensure that ordinances and policies that support walking are actually implemented. To get started, the PBIC offers some free [webinars](#).

- A combination of education and encouragement efforts can have a large effect on pedestrian volumes as well as pedestrian safety in a community. Also, there can be major differences in the walking abilities, behavioral patterns, and learning capacities of different groups of pedestrians and other road users. Because of this, educational programs succeed when tailored to specific audiences and to the behaviors they seek to modify. Los Altos could consider environmental campaigns and walking training or “walk to work” days and should tailor any campaigns to specific populations. Also, diversifying the audience to reach more residents of different types could be very effective in terms of educational initiatives. This [PBIC webpage](#) provides more guidance.
- Decatur, Georgia, a Silver-level Walk Friendly Community, has a [number of great events](#) including the Walk for Lunch event (walking maps and lunch on event days), the Terrific Thursdays events (free Pedicabs, later store hours, and discounts at businesses), and Car Free Day. These events could be good models for Los Altos.
- Gold-level Arlington County, Virginia, has education and encouragement programs that are incredibly important in fostering community support for walkability:
 - [Street Smart](#) is a public awareness and enforcement campaign in its tenth year that uses print, outdoor, online, and broadcast media channels throughout the metropolitan Washington area to reach a diverse audience.
 - The [Car Free Diet](#) program is an innovative development aimed at raising awareness of the health, environmental, financial, and commuting benefits of going car-free or car-lite through web, video, blogs, social media, transit advertising, a Car-Free Diet Calculator, and media outreach.
 - The Neighborhood 25 program is a campaign that began in 2010 as a response to the difference in fatal crashes that occur at 20 mph and 30 mph with “Keep Kids Alive – Drive 25” signs placed throughout the neighborhoods in conjunction with police placement of speed feedback signs.
- Another great campaign is organized through the Parks and Recreation department of Seattle, which shows the city’s commitment to walkers of all ages through a volunteer-supported walking program for adults age 50 and up called [Sound Steps](#). Sound Steps is a free, community-based walking program designed to get older adults active and experiencing the benefits of regular exercise. It is a year-round program that provides connection to other walkers, tools to measure progress, a number of weekly walks from various locations, monthly hikes, and training for longer events. This might be something to consider for Los Altos.
- To encourage people to walk, the city should create a walking map including all walking facilities and likely pedestrian destinations. This can help people see all the options available to them and create a walking route. The Bronze-level Village of Shorewood, Wisconsin, gives every new resident in a “walking kit,” which includes a [walking map](#). The kit also provides coupons to encourage residents to shop locally.
- In Bronze-level, Flagstaff, Arizona, the city hosted a series of 16 themed walks along city trails. The walks were organized by a variety of local community partners with themes including geology, history, flora, or astronomy. By organizing walking tours, people can experience the history and natural beauty of a place, while getting some exercise.
- There are many community groups and businesses that might be interested in helping your city create a wayfinding system. In Gold-level Washington D.C., the Downtown Business Improvement District led the effort of 30 stakeholder groups to develop a citywide wayfinding signage system that is now slated to expand to neighborhoods beyond downtown.

- Consider an Open Streets event, or Ciclovía, during which a selected route will be closed to vehicle traffic and opened up for jogging, walking, and cycling. The event focuses community attention on alternative modes, and can provide numerous other benefits. More information available [from the PBIC](#) or the [Open Streets Project](#). Case studies from [Chicago](#) and [Clearwater, Florida](#), can also provide more guidance.
- In 2008, Seattle, designated as a Platinum-level Walk Friendly Community, piloted Car Free Days to open up streets to bicycling, walking, and playing. The city renamed it Celebrate Seattle [Summer Streets](#) in 2009 and made extensive efforts to involve local businesses, farmers markets, parades, art walks, and more. In 2012, they had Summer Streets events on four different streets through the summer, as well as [Bicycle Sundays](#) almost every Sunday from May to September.
- Another great example from a Bronze-level WFC is [Atlanta Streets Alive](#), which closes a street segment to motorized traffic and opens it up for people to play, walk, and bike. At least two miles of street are closed for four hours and the route rarely stays the same. The Atlanta Bicycle Coalition organizes the event and it is held multiple times a year. At the September 2014 event, 106,000 participants enjoyed nearly five miles of open streets and more than 50 activities along the route.

Engineering Needs Attention

- The sidewalk width standards are positive, but the city should consider adding buffer zones to sidewalks. Buffers can improve the aesthetic appearance and safety of sidewalks, as well as improving stormwater management.
- It sounds like some residents are opposed to sidewalks because they feel it alters the rural feel of the community. However, it appears that Los Altos is somewhat dense, so a more connected pedestrian network would likely lead to a great increase in the level of walking. Sidewalks also have tremendous safety benefits as they have been found to reduce walking along the roadway type crashes by 86 percent.
- Sidewalks are the backbone of a good pedestrian system and encourage walking. Walkways should be part of every new and renovated facility and efforts should be undertaken to retrofit streets without sidewalks. Based on the numbers, your sidewalk coverage is not representative of a truly walkable environment. The amount of recent and planned sidewalk construction is unacceptable. If funding and public perception are the main challenges, consider using crash data and your soon-to-be-completed sidewalk inventory to identify the highest priority areas where you can fill in sidewalk gaps.
- Consider making the city's list of missing sidewalk links available online. This will help make the process more transparent to the public. Gold-level Boulder, Colorado, keeps an easy-to-read description of the [Missing Sidewalk Links Program](#) on the city website. Web-users are able to view a prioritized list of sidewalk projects and learn how these projects are funded. The City of Seattle has an excellent [website](#) that covers its system of prioritizing sidewalk improvements.
- Los Altos needs to step up its schedule for installing curb ramps, which appear to be lacking throughout the city. The city should consider creating an easy online form or even using an app to allow people to report missing or broken ramps and sidewalks.
- Corvallis, Oregon, a Gold-level Walk Friendly Community, has an excellent program to replace and install sidewalks called the [Sidewalk Safety Program](#). The goal of the

Sidewalk Safety Program is to repair and replace hazardous sidewalks and to complete unfinished sections of the sidewalk system over time. Each year, one of eleven sidewalk districts is surveyed for sidewalks in need of repairs. The repair criteria are specific, to ensure consistent application in every situation. Corvallis's Sidewalk Maintenance Fee provides an annual source of funding to do this work, and the city will repair defects each year up to the amount of funding available. Los Altos could consider some of these strategies.

- Great job ensuring that all traffic signals have countdown signal heads, audible signals, and accessible pedestrian push buttons. It's also a step in the right direction that you are replacing parallel lines with ladder-style crosswalk markings.
- A simple, useful change at signalized intersections is the leading pedestrian interval (LPI). The LPI gives pedestrians an advance walk signal before the motorists get a green light, giving the pedestrian several seconds to start in the crosswalk where there is a concurrent signal. Pedestrians are more visible to motorists and motorists are more likely to yield to them.
- Check out how these WFCs make their traffic calming process transparent and easy-to-follow for residents: [Seattle, WA](#); [Northampton, MA](#); [Burlington, VT](#); and [Ann Arbor, MI](#).
- If Los Altos has overbuilt roads that could benefit from lane reduction or narrowing, check out this new [Road Diet Informational Guide](#) from the Federal Highway Administration. It could help you make the case for safer, more complete streets.

Enforcement Needs Attention

- Targeted enforcement programs are an area for improvement in Los Altos. Enforcement efforts can have a large effect on motorist yielding behavior.
- One effective method, particularly at locations with a documented crash problem, is the crosswalk sting or pedestrian decoy technique. This involves plainclothes police officers crossing in the crosswalk and observing if cars are yielding. If cars do not yield, the plainclothes officer will radio to another officer to pull over the offending vehicle. By using this enforcement type, drivers are made aware of what types of behaviors are not allowed. Using this in conjunction with [progressive ticketing scheme](#) allows officers to educate drivers more than penalize them.
- Adult school crossing guards play an important role in the lives of children who walk or bicycle to school. The presence of adult crossing guards can lead to more parents feeling comfortable about their children walking or bicycling to school. While the primary role of an adult school crossing guard is to guide children safely across the street, children also remain responsible for their own safety. The police department and city engineers should proactively work with the schools to decide where crossing guards need to be placed.
- There are many model crossing guard programs in existence. At minimum, crossing guards should be vetted by the community, trained by certified training programs, provided with class 2 reflective vests, and hand held stop paddles. The [Adult School Crossing Guard Guidelines](#) might be a helpful resource.
- Gainesville, Florida, a Bronze-level Walk Friendly Community, has a model crossing guard program. To determine the placement of school crossing guards, the city's traffic engineering department considers gap studies, sight distance, vehicle and pedestrian

traffic volumes, ages and grades of students, vehicular speeds, width of street and number of lanes of traffic, existing traffic controls, and traffic crash history. [School crossing guards](#) are required to take an initial eight-hour certification course and an annual two-hour refresher course.

- Improving pedestrian safety in a community or region is typically the result of implementing different safety treatments and changing agency design policies. Crash countermeasures, or treatments intended to address pedestrian safety concerns, can take several forms: operational and construction projects intended to fix specific problems; changes in design guidelines to help improve streets and intersections in future projects; and education and enforcement programs aimed at achieving changes in motorist and pedestrian behavior or attitude. City police, traffic engineers, and planners should establish a quarterly meeting to discuss pedestrian safety and review any crashes involving pedestrians or bicyclists. This can have a profound effect on safety by approaching the issue from different standpoints and using different tools.

Evaluation

Needs Attention

- Los Altos should implement a count program, which could have substantial benefits in terms of funding for pedestrian improvements. A count program can help "make the case" for more/enhanced walking amenities and can help prioritize improvements. Consider participating in the [National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project](#), or use their [count forms](#) and methodology to begin your own counts.
- Ideally, this program should perform counts several times a year and at locations throughout the city. Permanent count stations should also be considered to provide annual data. Gold-level Arlington County provides a good model where they perform seasonal manual counts in addition to 18 automated counters. They are also developing an integrated database to store, analyze and share results of the two sets of data.
- The 2013 edition of FHWA's [Traffic Monitoring Guide](#) (TMG) includes a review of existing techniques and guidance for implementing traffic monitoring programs for nonmotorized transportation. See Chapter 4 of the document.
- You could also check out the recently published [Guidebook on Pedestrian and Bicycle Volume Data Collection](#). In addition to explaining different counting methods, this guide shows how count data can be used for measuring facility usage, evaluating before-and-after volumes, monitoring travel patterns, safety analysis, and project prioritization.
- Los Altos should look into conducting more road safety audits, especially in high-crash areas. The [Pedestrian Road Safety Audit Guidelines and Prompt Lists](#) can be very valuable for diverse groups of city staff (engineers, planners, law enforcement) in reviewing the pedestrian environment and developing recommendations, while other tools such as [walkability checklists](#), pedestrian level of service, [Pedestrian Intersection Safety Index](#), and [Health Impact Assessments](#) can provide targeted information about pedestrian safety on roadways and in the community overall.
- In Silver-level Tallahassee, Florida, the [Comprehensive Plan Mobility Element](#) created multimodal level of service (LOS) standards and performance targets for the Mobility District (18-square-mile section of the city), whereby pedestrian, bicycle, and transit LOS take priority over vehicle LOS in the evaluation of roadway improvements, capital improvement planning, and funding allocation.

- There are lots of examples of project evaluation activities, performance measures, and tools in the [Evaluating Complete Streets Projects guide](#) from the National Complete Streets Coalition.
- Conducting pre- and post-evaluations for developments and other projects in Los Altos is the only way to know how your efforts have improved pedestrian safety. Los Altos should begin pre- and post-evaluations for every pedestrian project in order to develop a better understanding of how it has impacted pedestrian safety and walkability—you can use positive findings to justify more investment in pedestrian projects.

More Information

If you have questions or comments regarding this feedback, your community's initiatives and programs, or the application process in general, we'd like to hear from you. Please contact:

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You can also send general inquiries to info@walkfriendly.org